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E KŪ ANA KA PAIA:  
FINDING  
CONTEMPORARY  
RELEVANCE  
IN AN ANCIENT  
PROPHECY

BY NOELLE M. K. Y. KAHANU

One hundred and twenty years after Bishop Museum was first established, we are once again poised to open our doors to the community. The greatly anticipated ceremonial reopening of Hawaiian Hall, following its first major renovation in over a century, will finally take place in August of 2009. This reopening is a truly remarkable undertaking for it combined the skill, expertise, and passion of world-renowned exhibit designers, award-winning historic architects, dedicated staff, and most importantly, respected Hawaiian community leaders, scholars, cultural practitioners, and artists. The result is a state-of-the-art museum that embodies a Native Hawaiian world view, layered in meaning and authentic in voice. Throughout this endeavor, we who have worked on this project have strived to remember our founder, Charles Reed Bishop, and Princess Pauahi, in whose honor our museum was created. This essay seeks to share our journey, from inception to our grand re-opening.

In 1889, Charles Reed Bishop founded a museum in memory of his beloved wife, Princess Bernice Pauahi. She was the great granddaughter of King Kamehameha the

First—he who established the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1810. When Pauahi was born in 1831, the native population numbered about 124,000, but by the time of her death in 1884, only 44,000 Hawaiians remained—a 65% decline. Throughout her lifetime, she and Charles bore witness to the death of tens of thousands of her people and they worried about a Hawaiian culture that was rapidly disappearing.

Indeed the very lands upon which Bishop Museum is located reflect this same story of depopulation and loss in a complex progression of transitions. The ahupua'a of Kapālama (or Pālama), named for the enclosure of lama wood where young chiefs were trained as leaders, was awarded to Moses Kekuaiwa in January of 1848. Eldest son of Kekūanao'a and Kīna'u, he passed away at the age of 19, and because he had no children, the lands passed to his sister, Victoria Kamāmalu. After her death at the age of 27, because she had no children, the lands passed to her brother, Lot. Because King Lot (Kamehameha IV) died at the age of 42 without children, the lands were inherited by his half-sister, Princess Ruth Ke'elikōlani. When Princess Ruth died at the age of 56 without surviving children, she

*Opposite: Kī'i pōhaku (stone image) of the god Kanaloa made by Rocky Ka'ouliokahikiolo'ehu Jensen, 2005.*

*Below: 'Ahu 'ula (feather cloaks) decorated with geometric patterns.*





Left: Hawaiian Hall under construction, ca. 1899. [Source: Bishop Museum Archives]

Right: Charles Reed and Bernice Pauahi Bishop, 1875. [Source: Bishop Museum Archives]



willed her estates to her beloved cousin, Bernice Pauahi Bishop. Finally, when Bernice Pauahi died at the age of 52 without children, her lands were dedicated in trust for the benefit of the education of Hawaiian children. None of us today can imagine the grief and the loss our chiefs endured during their lifetimes, but that is, in many respects, the task of Bishop Museum—to keep the names, the struggles, the ideals, and the stories of our ali'i alive.

Bernice Pauahi and Charles Reed Bishop traveled through Europe, visiting some of the finest museums in the world. Inspired by their experiences, they returned home dreaming of a museum that would preserve Pauahi's vanishing cultural heritage, embodied by the Hawaiian heirlooms that she possessed. This is the vision that Charles Reed Bishop brought to life a year after his wife's passing—the museum's original mission was to "preserve and display the cultural and historic relics of the Kamehameha family that Princess Pauahi had acquired."

The museum's founding collections also would come to include those of two other high ranking chiefesses, her cousin, Princes Ruth Ke'elikōlani and Queen Emma. All contemporaries, these three ali'i women passed away without

surviving children, and thus their treasured heirlooms came to form the founding collections of the museum. Our very existence is owed to our chiefs. Our collections represent what they treasured and loved the most—but could not pass on to any lineal descendants.

Over time, the collections of Bishop Museum increased such that a new facility was in order. Construction on Hawaiian Hall began in 1899, with its interior finally completed in 1903. A masterpiece of Victorian design, it was heralded as "one of the noblest buildings of Honolulu." It quickly became the jewel, the star of Bishop Museum, and displayed much of the Hawaiian collection.

But over the last century, the jewel of our museum has shown its age—peeling lead-based paint, termite-ravaged koa cases, rotting wood, and outdated electrical wiring. As the physical demeanor of our most significant exhibition space diminished, so too did our role as an institution show the effects of time. Among the oldest of entities in Hawai'i, we have a storied past. We have purchased burial goods, participated in the excavation of ancestral human remains, and denied collections access to community members. But we have done much good as well—collected, preserved, and

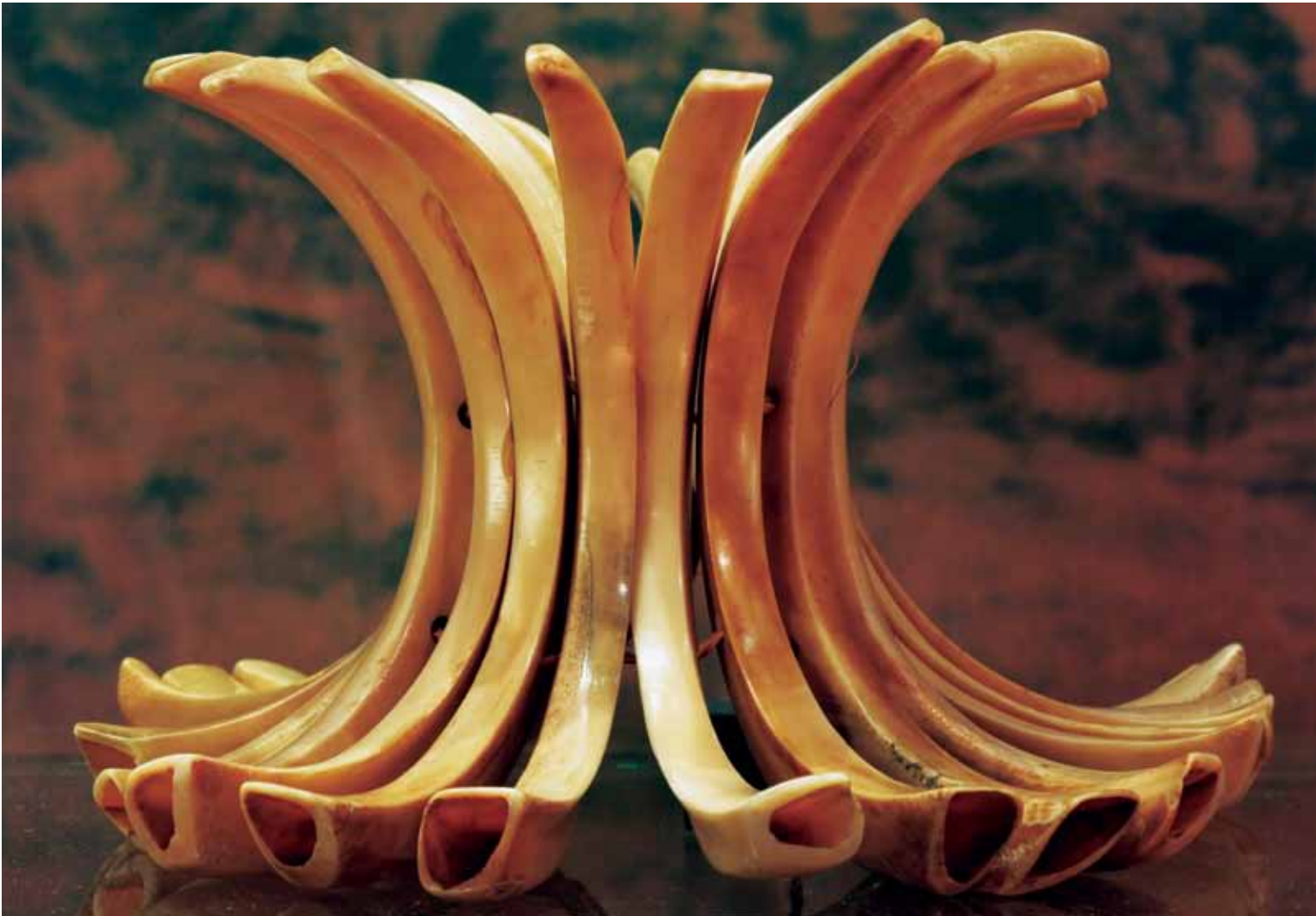
translated the oral history of Native Hawaiians throughout the island chain, published some of the most important of Hawaiian language and cultural resources, and we have cared for the treasures of our ali'i. As with any institution with such a long history, Bishop Museum has had lessons to learn, relationships to mend, and wounds to heal.

Thus while we speak of the physical renovation of Hawaiian Hall, what is more important is its restoration. And what does one restore? We restore health, we restore trust, we restore faith, we restore a foundation, we restore a nation. It is in this context that we undertook this massive effort to restore Hawaiian Hall. But how does one accomplish this? When we closed Hawaiian Hall in 2006, we closed the door on speaking about Hawaiians in the past tense with that anonymous omnipotent all knowing Western voice. On speaking of lost arts and the pure objectification of

Hawaiian artifacts. On speaking *about* Hawaiians, not *with* them. In its place, through consultation with Hawaiian community leaders, scholars, artists, and practitioners, we have created a hall that reflects a Hawaiian world view.

We have taken the three floors of Hawaiian Hall and overlaid upon them the physical and spiritual realms of the Hawaiian people—from the first floor of Kai Ākea, the wide expanse of the sea, to the second floor, Wao Kānaka, the realm of man, and the third floor, Wao Lani, the heavenly realm. We reflect upon the gods, their different body forms, areas of responsibility, and their seasonal changes. We speak of the lunar cycle, which determined how Hawaiians fished, planted, and worshipped. We are filling the hall with Hawaiian voices, through chants, proverbs, and mo'olelo, stories. We are also showing the continuity of the Hawaiian people through time, by including the works of

*Below: Kūpe'e (anklet) made of boar tusks.*





contemporary cultural practitioners and artists of today, alongside those created by our ancestors.

The visitor's journey through Hawaiian Hall ends in Wao Lani, where we encounter the world of our chiefs—not only who they were, but how they were related, for these are the threads of mana, of power, that form the living tapestry upon which our kingdom was founded. Wao Lani is not merely an honorific treatment of our monarchs—it is a recognition both of their blessings and their burdens, for they carried the weight of a nation upon their shoulders.

For the first time, the exhibition also squarely confronts the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani in 1893: what led to it, what transpired, and how the Hawaiian community responded—whether through a thwarted armed insurrection, the writing of a song, or the fine stitching of a protest quilt. But how could we channel this energy, loss and heartache of a nation taken by force? The final display in Wao Lani is a mural, created by over a dozen Native Hawaiian high school students and guided in their efforts by Meleanna Meyer. They were asked to reflect upon the prophecy of Kapihe, he who lived during the time of Kamehameha the Great. He had predicted an overturning, and that came to pass with the overthrow of the Hawaiian religious system in 1819 and the coming of American Protestant missionaries just a year later.

E iho ana o luna	that which was above would come down
E pi'i ana o lalo	that which was below would rise up
E hui ana nā moku	the islands shall unite
E kū ana ka paia	the walls shall stand firm

This chant represents a change in the social and political order and it is as relevant today as when it was first uttered. It enables us to not only look at the overthrow of the kapu system, or that of Queen Lili'uokalani, but also at the Hawaiian renaissance movement of the 1970s, up through today. This chant acknowledges difficulty and sorrow, heartache and turmoil, warfare and destruction. It acknowledges that despite these profound changes, we are still here. We have survived and we will continue to come together as a people—e hui ana nā moku.

This chant is a prophecy that we will stand together in the face of adversity. We are a stronger and more united community, not *in spite* of our past, but *because* of it. And this message of transformation transcends any one people—for all of us have been hurt, all of us have experienced loss, but



we have survived and we are stronger for it—whether as an individual, a community, or a nation. This message of resilience, hope, and determination, is the final reverberating message within Hawaiian Hall.

My personal hope is that we have succeeded in creating a Hawaiian Hall that that reflects the vision of Charles Reed Bishop and Princess Bernice Pauahi. May it honor the lives, struggles, and triumphs of our ali'i and their people. May it be grounded in our ancestral traditions, yet also embrace our future as a living, thriving, dynamic Hawaiian community.

Hawaiian Hall now begins another stage in its illustrious life. Its new exhibits may indeed spark controversy, conversation, and debate, but these are good things, for it is the role of museums to be places for community dialogue and discourse. May we not shy away from the past, or from difficult issues, but rather embrace and celebrate our complexities. Together, may we experience a Hawaiian Hall that is meaningful, relevant, powerful, and ultimately, transformative.

*Opposite: From "Ho'ohuli," a community mural project led by Meleanna Aluli Meyer, inspired by the prophecy of Kapihe.*

*Above: Lei niho palaoa, necklace of human hair adorned with a whale tooth pendant.*

*Left: Pē'ahi (fan) woven from coconut leaves.*